



The Forest Emergency Recovery & Research Act

OVERVIEW

Natural catastrophes such as tornadoes, wind storms, and insect epidemics are frequent occurrences in the forests of the United States. Large-scale catastrophic wildfires have become more common in recent years and are expected to continue until the health of our forests is restored. With approximately 190 million acres of federal land at high risk of catastrophic fire, restoration of forests will take many years. Because of catastrophic events, there are now over one million acres on our national forests in need of reforestation - and this number is increasing. Rapid assessment of damage, quick action, and funding are needed following catastrophic events to restore landscapes and prevent additional reforestation backlog. Furthermore, peer reviewed research is needed on the effects and effectiveness of some post catastrophic treatments.

The Forest Emergency Recovery and Research Act would address these concerns. It would require that any catastrophic event over 1,000 acres must be quickly evaluated and restoration recommendations made. At that point, the Secretary could use existing law to address the problem, or if expedited restoration work is needed, expedited environmental review of proposed actions would be performed by the agencies and would include full public notice and participation. In forest types that have been significantly researched, pre-approved management practices could be implemented immediately after an environmental review. Emergency reforestation and restoration projects would then commence. Administrative appeals and litigation would follow the guidelines established under the overwhelmingly bipartisan Healthy Forests Restoration Act (HFRA). Adjacent non-federal lands would also be included in the evaluation when desired by tribal, local government, and private landowners. The evaluation would determine if expedited reforestation and other recovery work are needed in the area and would also identify research opportunities.

Research would be strengthened by: 1) requiring forest health partnerships with colleges and universities when establishing post catastrophe research projects; 2) requiring development of peer reviewed research protocols; 3) allowing peer reviewed research projects to be established in areas affected by catastrophe, and; 4) authorizing research projects on existing Forest Service Experimental Forests.

The Forest Emergency Recovery and Research Act would expand authorized uses of several funding sources for both federal and non-federal land, including annual appropriations, the United States Forest Service Knutson-Vandenberg timber trust fund dollars and salvage sale receipts, Bureau of Land Managements Forest Ecosystem Health and Recovery fund account, and federal Emergency Management Administration funds. The Act would also authorize technical assistance from federal employees for private landowners.

In summary, applying authorities similar to those allowed through the HFRA, the Forest Emergency Recovery and Research Act could greatly help to reestablish forests after catastrophic events. Rapid assessment of conditions, quick action to assist in recovery, and additional funding sources would all be employed to protect forests from further degradation and to speed reforestation efforts. In addition, research activities would improve the state of knowledge about post catastrophic treatments and help the congressionally authorized National Forest Experimental Forests accomplish their mission. Finally, while facilitating quick action in the wake of catastrophic events and strengthening research, The Forest Emergency Recovery and Research Act would ensure collaboration with tribes, state and local governments, colleges and universities, and other interested people.

For additional information, please contact the Subcommittee on Forests & Forest Health (202.225.0691) or Congressman Greg Walden's office (202.225.6730).